

1. Introduction

Transportation, at its core, is about more than concrete, asphalt and steel – it is about people and their access to work, school, loved ones, and nature’s rich bounty. Under the leadership of President William Jefferson Clinton, Vice President Albert Gore, Jr. and Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater, the people of the Department of Transportation (DOT) have redefined transportation beyond the narrow public works definition. We have acknowledged our top transportation priority – safety – while at the same time we have demonstrated our ability to improve mobility, spur the economy, enhance the human and natural environment, and ensure national security.

In this *Strategic Plan*, published in the first year of the new century and the millennium, we will continue to raise the bar of performance ever skyward. Through our update of former Secretary of Transportation William Coleman’s *Trends and Choices* report, we have considered how transportation has evolved in the past 25 years. Through our *Policy Architecture*, we are proposing a framework for effective decision-making throughout the transportation enterprise. The future of transportation is about choices, the interlocking web of policies and practices that shape and inform transportation decisions by stakeholders at all levels: governments, trade associations, labor, businesses, consumers and interest groups. Together, the *Strategic Plan*, the *Trends and Choices* update and the *Policy Architecture* will help us achieve excellence in transportation.

The transportation system of the new century will be safe and sustainable to be sure but also international in reach, intermodal in form, intelligent in character and inclusive in service. We will create a climate of innovation to bring such a system into being as we move forward lifted by a visionary spirit, motivated by a ONE DOT sense of creativity and cooperation and propelled by new technologies.

Technology is transforming transportation in revolutionary ways and at breathtaking speed. Great, long historic sweeps of transportation development in the United States have telescoped to months. The evolution from a system dependent on harbors and rivers to a continent joined by great steel rails and iron horses, to a nation joined by ribbons of highways and crisscrossed by soaring jets took two hundred years. Now, in less than half a decade, as we were getting used to just-in-time delivery and its companion problem, empty back-hauls for truckers, an Internet clearinghouse that promises to eliminate the problem has been created. Also disappearing are paper travel tickets, catalog orders, and brick and mortar businesses. They are being replaced by on-line purchases of e-tickets, narrowcast service delivery via the Internet, dot-coms, click and mortar businesses, and near simultaneous computer design and manufacturing for delivery as needed.

This rapid change was unforeseen before the power and freedom offered to everyone through the Internet, from the largest corporation to the single individual was linked with the calculating power of the computer. This technology marriage has accelerated the rate of change in transportation more than anyone dreamed even five years ago and poses exciting challenges to DOT.

Accepting these challenges, we used a new approach in building this strategic plan. We created global transportation scenarios set 30 years in the future to simulate the interrelated conditions within which DOT could plausibly operate. We conducted multiple visioning sessions and interviewed people in transportation and in disciplines related to transportation to help chart our course. We invited transportation consumers and providers to participate in our strategy sessions and we posted successive drafts of the plan on the Internet to solicit additional comments. This open, collaborative process helped us to push the envelope in thinking about the impacts of technology and globalization on our lives, about our customary ways of managing our leadership role in the transportation system, and about how we should carry out our mission.

As a result of this process, we now understand that we need to develop new ways of thinking, new approaches, new policies, and new strategies – in fact, to foster a climate of innovation throughout the system – if we are to meet our national transportation goals. Creating a climate of innovation requires us to collaborate with and engage a more diverse group of stakeholders to:

- Support strategic transportation research;
- Reduce barriers to and increase incentives for innovative ways of moving people and goods;
- Act quickly to incorporate web-enabled and other new technologies in conducting our daily business; and
- Support the education of the next generation of transportation professionals.

DOT has many tools to apply in support of innovation. They include the ability to leverage private and other non-federal funds; to support demonstration projects; to benchmark and disseminate information on best practices in transportation; and to diffuse new technologies into the transportation enterprise. We aim to achieve our strategic goals by improving our ability to manage for results and innovation while keeping pace with and anticipating the needs of the traveling public and the transportation industry. We are optimistic that our contributions will be seen by the public as value added.

As we present this new strategic plan, we rededicate ourselves to being a Department that is visionary and vigilant. We pledge that we will:

- Be agile in addressing emerging transportation needs;
- Collaborate with and support our partners in the transportation enterprise; and
- Foster innovation throughout the system to realize the power of transportation to make the lives of all Americans better.